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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KUWAIT 000378

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PREF](#) [PHUM](#) [EAID](#) [IZ](#) [KU](#)
SUBJECT: KUWAIT ASKED TO ASSIST IRAQI REFUGEES

REF: A. STATE 30028
[1](#)B. KUWAIT 313
[1](#)C. KUWAIT 77

Classified By: CDA Alan G. Misenheimer for reasons 1.4 b and d

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Ambassador James Foley met in Kuwait March 27 with the heads of the GOK,s Humanitarian Operations Center, the Red Crescent Society and UNHCR,s regional office to discuss enhanced support to Iraqi refugees in the region. Kuwait has demonstrated a readiness over the past five years to provide humanitarian aid to Iraq. All of Ambassador Foley,s Kuwaiti interlocutors concurred with his emphasis on assisting those displaced in Iraq, and urged U.S. engagement with GOK leadership on this subject. End summary.

UNHCR: Legal residency in GCC states optimal

[1](#)2. (C) On March 27, Senior Coordinator for Iraqi Refugee Issues Ambassador James Foley visited Kuwait as part of a regional tour to encourage enhanced support to Iraqi refugees in the region. In a meeting with UNHCR, Riyadh-based Regional Representative Ahmed Gubartalla and his deputy Karim Atassi told Ambassador Foley that legal residency in GCC countries is the optimal outcome for Iraqi refugees in the region. However, according to Gubartella, some GCC states may have reached their unstated limits for residency permits for Iraqis, potentially increasing the vulnerable segment of the Iraqi refugee population in the region. Atassi suggested that the USG request GCC governments to reconsider the criteria affecting residency permit applications, with a view to increasing the number of Iraqi beneficiaries. Ambassador Foley stated that he would discuss this recommendation with relevant colleagues.

[1](#)3. (C) The UNHCR representatives described the challenges facing their office in processing Iraqi asylum seekers (including those who worked for the USG in Iraq). Those Iraqi refugees who have not received residency permits from GCC governments constitute a vulnerable population which the UNHCR,s small regional offices have been struggling to process in the past two years. UNHCR headquarters in Geneva has agreed to increase funding for regional offices; nevertheless, Atassi suggested that the USG reinforce the need for enhanced resources with interlocutors at UNHCR headquarters in Geneva.

[1](#)4. (SBU) Gubartalla said that UNHCR has been actively engaging GCC governments on contributing funds to UN appeals for Iraqi refugees. However, with the exception of the UAE's donation of \$10 million (to assist Iraqi refugees in Syria), regional governments have not proven forthcoming. The UNHCR representatives emphasized the importance of USG assistance in securing funding for the outstanding international appeals for Iraqi refugees.

Kuwait's Unexpended Pledges
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¶5. (C) LTG (retired) Ali Al-Mu'min, the Chief of the GOK's Humanitarians Operations Center (HOC), spoke frankly of his government's failure to follow through on several large pledges made to Iraqi reconstruction and humanitarian programs. He stated that as much as \$500 million has been earmarked, but has not been spent because of an unwillingness to commit the money to projects (Ref B). Mu'min also laid blame on the Iraqi government, which has failed to propose projects to the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development, which, he said, is in possession of \$120 million specifically earmarked for programs in Iraq. Mu'min also said that concerns about security and corruption in Iraq have hindered both planning and implementation of GOK-funded projects in Iraq.

¶6. (C) Mu'min (who is the GOK's ambassador-designate to Iraq) pointed out that his government is often disinclined to contribute to international appeals (such as the various UN appeals for Iraqi refugees) because the GOK prefers bilateral projects that build confidence between the Kuwaiti people and those of the recipient nation. He also stated that his entity, the HOC, is the main conduit for Kuwaiti aid to Iraq and his programs largely comprise infrastructure projects (e.g., school rehabilitation projects), which clearly demonstrate Kuwait's commitment to the Iraqi people. (Note: Other GOK officials have alluded to the Government's reluctance to engage in projects in Iraq, given certain "sensitivities," security and corruption).

¶7. (C) Mu'min urged Ambassador Foley and other senior USG

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representatives to appeal to senior Kuwaiti politicians to increase funding for humanitarian projects in Iraq. He also requested a U.S. appeal to the Kuwaiti immigration authorities to remove some of the new restrictions imposed on Iraqis seeking entry to Kuwait (Note: Such restrictions were imposed following a controversial "eulogy" by Shi'a Kuwaitis for slain terrorist Imad Mugniyah in mid-February (Ref C)).

¶8. (C) Mu'min agreed to a request from Ambassador Foley for assistance in expediting Kuwait entry permits for Iraqi recipients of the Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) program.

¶9. (C) Barges Al Barges, the President of the Kuwait Red Crescent Society told Ambassador Foley that he would relay to the Prime Minister and the Foreign Minister the Ambassador's message on the need for increased assistance for Iraqi refugees. He estimates that the upheaval of the past five years in Iraq has caused Iraq's population to diminish from 23 million to 18 million people. Barges, who has close ties to the ruling family, advised that the U.S. needed to withdraw its troops from Iraqi cities and towns and "let Iraqis rule themselves." The U.S. could then focus on capturing foreign fighters, including Al-Qaeda elements, in Iraq, he said.

¶10. (U) Ambassador Foley's meetings with Mu'min and Barges received positive press coverage in most of the Arabic and English dailies in Kuwait.

¶11. (U) This message was cleared by Ambassador Foley.

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Misenheimer